THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES) : (a) to (c) From 1-1-1999 till date seventeen foreign defence delegations visited India and twenty three defence delegations from India visited foreign countries. It will not be in the interest of national security to disclose further details of these visits. In addition, defence delegations from twenty seven countries visited India in connection with Defence Exhibition 1999 held from October 12-16-1999 in New Delhi.

The above visits do not include 'IN' and 'OUT' Goodwill visits at the level of Service Chiefs.

During these visits only one MOU and one Agreement as detailed below were signed :—

(i) An MOU was signed on 24th July, 1999 between the Governments of the Republic of India and the Republic of Namibia on acquisition of aircraft and marine vessels.

(ii) A General Agreement was signed on March 22, 1999 between the Governments of India and Russian Federation on training of defence personnel.

Group 'A' Officers in MES

3966. CHAUDHARY CHUNNILAL : Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that MES executes civil works for departments of Ministry of Defence only, whereas CPWD does so for remaining Ministries;

(b) whether the combined strength of Group 'A' and Commissioned Officers in MES is double the strength of Group 'A' officers in CPWD;

(c) as to why a substantial annual saving of more than 200 crores is not being achieved by manning MES by existing strength of civilian officers and staff and deployment of army personnel in their corps functions here a serious shortage exists; and

(d) the action being taken on recommendations of Fifth Central Pay Commission for progressive civilisation of MES ?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES) : (a) and (b) Yes, Sir.

(c) and (d) MES is a mixed organisation composed of civilian and army personnel. It is necessary to retain this composition because of the operational role assigned to MES.

Engineering Officers for Civil Functions

3967. CHAUDHARY CHUNNILAL : Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether corps of engineer officers trained for combat are being largely utilised in organisations like MES, DGBR, Survey of India, CME, in civil functions;

(b) the rank-wise number of army engineers with commissioned service of more than twenty years as on 31st March, 2000;

(c) the rank-wise number of officers out of (b) above who have served more than ten years outside the combat duties; and

(d) the action being taken to limit the duties of army engineers to combat duties to meet shortages in Engineer Regiments and simultaneously keeping them ever prepared for eventualities as recommended by Fifth Central Pay Commission ?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES) : (a) No, Sir. Army Engineers are trained to carry out engineering and combat tasks in support of military operations. As a part of their role, these officers are required to serve in Engineer units, MES, DGBR and CME which are a part of the Corps of Engineers. Army Engineers also serve in survey of India on tenure basis as per the laid down procedure. However, Army Engineers were being permanently seconded to the Survey of India earlier, but the same has been stopped since 1985. Presently, 68 officers permanently seconded to Survey of India are in service.

(b) Rank-wise number of Army Engineers with commissioned service of more than 20 years as on 31st March, 2000 is an under :—

(i) Lt. Gen.-04

(ii) Maj. Gen.-21

(iii) Brig.-95